

Freeethought

The Largest Circulated Rationalist Monthly

November, 1979

80 Paise

Thought for the Month.....

"The future of India depends on courageous application of scientific knowledge. Let the dogs of conservatism, ignorance and fanaticism bark, but the glorious Caravan of the Indian Nation will move on with irresistible force".

Sir C. V. Raman

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VOL. IX No. 11

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REASON THINKS; RELIGION DREAMS

Letters.....

FREETHOUGHT GUIDES

Sir,

Let me express my immense gratitude and sincere thanks to our beloved magazine 'FREETHOUGHT' for its wonderful guidance to the Rationalist minds. I have been reading your magazine for four months now. I am sure that FREETHOUGHT will enable everybody to think freely in a rational way.

K. AMBEDKAR
Kothapeta, A. P.

* * *

STATUE OF AMBEDKAR

Sir,

There are three college students' Govt. Hostels in Madras city. (1) The M. C. Raja Hostel (2) The Nandanam College Hostel (3) The Kodembakkam College students Hostel. These are filled with about 75% depressed class college students. They are naturally rationalistic and they want Dr. Ambedkar's Statue in Nandanam Hostel Complex, But the Hostel warden who is orthodox refused to allow Dr. Ambedkar's statue in the Hostel. The concerned welfare officer and the Director of Harijan and Tribal Welfare were approached for permission. But they did not reply. They bought the statue at their own cost. The Government which is celebrating PERIYAR CENTINARY must atleast agree to give permission to open the portrait of Dr. Ambedkar in the Nandanam Hostel.

—K. SRINIVASAN
Madras

RESERVATION

Sir,

We have already submitted many petitions requesting reservation for SC & ST people to become Chairmen in rural Panchayat unions. After many a memorandum, the Tamilnadu Govt. turns a deaf ear. The Block Development Officers are those whom rural masses contact. The government money which is spent for production and distribution of wealth is really done by Panchayat Chairmen. So the Government is requested to allot atleast fifty panchayat Chairmen seats for the S. C. and S. T. applicants.

—M. KANDASAMY
Madras

GANDHI DEFENDS CASTE!

"It is not a human invention, but an immutable law of Nature the statement of a tendency that is ever-present and at work like Newton's Law of Gravitation. Just as the Law of Gravitation existed even before it was discovered, so did the Law of Varna. It was given to the Hindu to discover that law. By their discovery and application of certain laws of Nature, the peoples of the West have easily increased their material possessions. Similarly, Hindus by their discovery of this irresistible social tendency have been able to achieve in the spiritual field what no other nation in the world has achieved."

—Mr. M. K. GANDHI



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Free thought

THE FARCE

The imminence of elections to the Indian Parliament has exposed to public ridicule the transient nature of what little scruples our 'leaders' proclaimed for themselves. The 'leaders' are busy devising stratagems and stunts to hoodwink the gullible electorate. Everyone is promised everything without any idea of fulfilling the promises.

The Janata politicians project their leader as the new champion of depressed classes. But can one say, with any honesty, that the Janata leader, the rich Kulak of Sasaram, is principled or incorruptible? The Jat Chief alias national P. M. had twice evinced sudden concern in reservation for backward classes but backed out of it. Expectedly, Desai has retired to delve into his Yoga, Astrology and therapeutic fads.

Mrs. Gandhi is projecting herself as a champion of the minorities and downtrodden, forgetting that it is herself and her family (who have been ruling the country for nearly 3 decades) who are responsible for the plight of the masses and for the rich becoming richer.

People are disillusioned and tired after 32 years of the so-called parliamentary democracy. Unemployment is at its peak while prices are sky-rocketing. No person, nor any of the contending parties can salvage the country. They have miserably failed whenever they captured power. It would appear that the evils are inherent in this exploitative system where the poor remain victims of the rich. How does one throw off the yoke? Not through elections, we suppose.

The alternative is not between parties or leaders, but between systems or ideologies. The present system of parliamentary democracy has been given a long-enough trial. Boycotting the elections and shunning the present breed of politicians is the real way to show one's disapproval of the existing system. Have not Assam and some villages in Tamil-nadu given us the lead?

NEWS AND NOTES

KOVOOR'S MEMORIAL MEETING AT MEDAK

The Medak District Rationalist Association organised the A. T. Kovoor Memorial Meeting at Medak at 6-00 P.M. on 28-10-1979. The Medak District Collector J. Bapu Reddy, I. A. S., presided over the meeting which was attended by over two thousand people. The memorial meeting was all the more significant since it was held just a week after the centenary celebrations of Church of South India (CSI), Medak, where a massive church—a monument to human stupidity stands with a hundred years of history.

The leading Nationalists in Andhra Pradesh who attended the meeting delivered luminous lectures on (1) The Bible—A dangerous moral guide (by Mr. K. Padma Rao, Vice-President, A. P. Rationalist Association), (2) Social Rationalism (by Dr. G. Mitra, a Shanglai-trained acupuncturist) and (3) An approach to Rationalist Atheism: (by Mr. R. Sendamarai of Tamil Nadu). The audience were moved by the rationalist songs rendered by Mr. Babu Rao. The meeting came to an end at 10-30 P.M. with exposure of spiritual frauds of Sai-Baba through magic show by

Mr. K. P. Swaminathan, a Rationalist Magician. Earlier Mr. N. Chalamaiah, President, Medak Dist. Rationalist Association while welcoming the gathering introduced the speakers to the audience.

Earlier at 11-00 A.M. The Medak Taluk Rationalist Association was inaugurated by Dr. G. Mitra. In his inaugural address, Dr. G. Mitra condemned the loot going on in the name of God and religion and advised the members to surge forward with well-organised rationalist associations all over the State. Messrs. B. Krishna and R. Gopal, President and Secretary respectively of Taluk Association were in the chairs. Mr. Chalamaiah briefed the members about the growing activities of Medak District Rationalist Association.

At 2-00 P. M. the Study Classes were conducted on (1) What is Rationalism and (2) Social Rationalism by Dr. G. Mitra.

Dr. K. N. Rao, Dr. V. Subba Rao Messrs B. Kistanna, R. Gopal, Reghu, and Babu Rao and other local rationalist friends contributed in a large measure to the success of the function.

—N. Chalamaiah, Kowdipalli.

NEW OFFICE BEARERS FOR W. G. DISTRICT UNIT

The General Body Meeting of the West Godavari Branch of A. P. R. A. which is affiliated to IRA was held on 7-10-79 at Eluru.

After the review of activities of the District unit from its inception, a few amendments were made to the bye-laws of the Association. It was also resolved to start the Taluk and Village units on an extensive scale. The following office bearers were elected for the ensuing term:

President :

Mr. M. Venkata Ramana Reddy

Vice-President :

Mr. K. Satyavardhana Rao

Gen. Secretary :

Mr. Gusasi

Organising Secy :

Mr. Ranganatha Suri

Treasurer :

Mr. A. Lakshminarayana

Jt. Treasurer :

Mr. T. Veeraraghavaiah

Committee Members :

Messrs.

M. Seetharamaswami,

D. Ravi Kumar,

G. Venkateswara Rao,

Y. Kanaka Rao,

P. Appala Raju, and M. Sambasiva Rao.

Dr. KOVOOR DRAMATIC FORCE

A dramatic troupe under the name and style of 'Dr. Kovoor Dramatic Force' was inaugurated on 21-10-79 at Eluru. The function was presided over by Mr. L. Sriram Prasad. Messrs. Korada Narasimha Rao, A. Chandrasekhar P. H. V. Somayajulu, V. Rama Rao, M. Venkata Ramana Reddy, P. Rama Jogeswara Rao were the chief guests at the function.

The dramatic troupe, whose aim is to stage progressive plays, has announced that their first play 'Asura ganam' will be staged shortly.

NEW MESSIAH OF VATICAN

Pope John Paul II declared that Islam and Christianity must promote solidarity—"This is a necessity of our age and an order of God".

The pontiff made the statement on the second day of his threeday visit to Turkey in an address to the small Catholic community gathered at St. Paul's Church in the Italian Embassy complex here.

—The Hindu

Comment : Will the Pope first make a 'Pilgrimage' to Northern Ireland and establish unity between Catholics and Protestants before trying to promote Christian—Muslim Brotherhood?

The following news item will prove the point!

CHRISTIAN GROUP OPPOSES
CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CALL

A group of Christian Church heads have warned that the Church would be greatly endangered if political alignments were sought to be ordered on the basis of belief in God.

In a statement issued after a meeting held in Tiruvalla on Wednesday, they spoke out against the recent call by the Catholic Bishops not to support in the coming elections forces opposed to religion and belief in God.

They also condemned the reported move for forming a Christian party which, they said, had been inspired by the Catholic Bishops' Call. Inhumanity, not atheism, was the central issue in today's political crisis and belief in God was demonstrated by one's approach to social change, they said.

The signatories to the statement included Most Rev. Geevarghese Mar Osthathiose, Metropolitan of the Syrian Orthodox Church, Rt. Rev. Paulose Mar Paulose, Bishop of the Caldean Syrian Church, and

Most Rev. Mathew Mar Barnabas, Metropolitan of the Syrian Orthodox Church.

The Church leaders said that democracy and secularism must be the paramount factors in the coming elections. The need of the hour was to oppose authoritarian and communal forces.

In the dispute on the Gift Deeds Bill, on which side were the Bishops who issued the recent call to the faithful, they asked. The Bishops' call would, besides encouraging authoritarian and communal forces, drive poor Christians away from faith and in effect encourage atheism, they said.

—*The Hindu*

* * *

JAIN MONKS TRAP MINOR GIRL

Two girls of the Jain Swetambara community, Devayani, aged 22, a graduate of the Gujarat University, daughter of a sugar dealer in Ahmedabad, and Prabha, aged 13, whose father hailing from Rajasthan has been residing in Madras for the past five decades, were initiated into the monastic order at the Dadawadi Jain temple in GT on November 25 under the guidance of Acharya Vikrama Sureshwarji.

The Diksha ceremony making them nuns is a traditional custom among Jains. Those ordained wear white garments, lead an austere life and walk bare-foot from one place to another, whatever may be the distance.

— *The Hindu*

Comment : This is yet another instance of the sordid practice of coercion of a minor girl. Minors are protected under Indian Law of Contract or Tort but our society allows "undue influence"

on a minor girl, too young to fathom the drudgery of a nun's life. Or did wealthy Jain businessmen colliding with the 'Acharya's and 'Muni's buy these innocent girls?

SUPERSTITION IN BANGLE TRADE

"Canards" exploiting human susceptibility to superstition are being spread by "vested interests" to ruin the plastic bangle industry, according to the President of the Plastic Bangle Manufacturers' Association Mr. Bogilal Gandhi.

The "insidious campaign" "by non-plastic bangle groups would have people believe that the husbands of women wearing plastic bangles and the brothers of spinsters would die, Mr. Gandhi told a press conference.

—*The Hindu*

* * *

ENFORCED MEDITATION

After the small raincoat factory in Rennes, France, was purchased by the Swiss Holding Maharishi firm, which is controlled by the religious Transcendental Meditation sect, at least 60 per cent of the employees were ordered to join the sect.

—*New Times*.

* * *

PUBLIC MEETING AT NELLORE

A public meeting was organized on 28-10-79 at the Town Hall in Nellore under the auspices of Nellore District Rationalist Association—a unit of Andhra Pradesh Pradesht Rationalist Association.

The meeting which was presided over by Dr. E. Rajagopala Reddi, President of the District Rationalist Association was addressed by Mr. A. Suryanarayana, General Secretary of I.R.A. on 'Ration-

alism vs. Superstition" and Ms. S. V. Vasundhra, Treasurer of I.R.A. on 'Rationalism and Women'. Earlier Mr. P. Bheemanna, local secretary welcomed the Chief Guests and the audience. The meeting concluded after all the questions sent by the members of the audience were answered to their satisfaction by Mr. A. Suryanarayana. The meeting was attended by about 1000 people of the town and neighbouring villages.

PRAKASAM DISTRICT ASSOCIATION FORMED

The Prakasam District Rationalist Association—a unit of Andhra Pradesh Rationalist Association was formed on 29-7-79, Mr. Ravipudi Venkatadri, President, A. P. R. A. explained the lines on which a Rationalist Association should function, Mr. N. V. Brahman addressed the gathering on "Individuals' Role in the Society".

The following office bearers were elected :

President : Mr. G. Raghavaiah

Secretary &

Treasurer : Mr. Gopala Reddi

The conference was followed by a Public Meeting presided over by Mr. Yella Reddi. Mr. Ravipudi Venkatadri, and Mr. K. Padma Rao, Vice-President of APRA spoke on "Supernatural Powers" and "Bible" respectively.

RATIONALIST WEDDING

On 7-10-79, Ms. Anu Geetha, daughter of Dr. Tripuraneni Venkateswara Rao, a leading rationalist of A. P. married Dr. V. Jaganmohana Rao, M.B.B.S., in the typical Rationalist style. The marriage function which took place at Kaviraja Kala Bhavan in Gudivada was attended by a large gathering. The meeting which was addressed by three persons representing three different religions, was followed by a Cosmopolitan Dinner.

FREETHOUGHT conveys its congratulations to the new couple.

DREAMS OF A PARANOID ?

Ramakrishna Paramahansa often had dreams of persecution, symbolic of a paranoid. He also had masochistic streaks in him. Learning tantric practices from a woman ascetic, he spent hours in self-torture fasting, sleeplessness frenzied dancing and singing and a mechanical chanting of mantras day and night. He also had dreams typical of a paranoid. His biographer R. R. Diwakar describes him as saying 'As I sat down to meditate, I would find a Sanyasin emerging from my body with a trident in hand and directing me to concentrate my mind on God, leaving aside all other thoughts. He threatened to plunge his weapon into my body if I did not do so Horrified (when fully awake), I would often burst into tears and pray.'

Readers' Forum

RAIN AND CRICKET

The following is the text of the letter Addressed to the Office Bearers, Karnataka Cricket Association, Bangalore by a Life Member, of IRA, Dr. S. J. Abhyankar Satara.

I was really dismayed to learn from the newspapers that you people, apparently sensible and educated, resorted to performing pooja of Tirupati Venkateshwara on the play-ground, with the hope that it will not rain there on the days of the cricket test. I profoundly hope that this is not true. If it is, then I would like to know if you really believe that it is the will of Lord Venkateshwara that makes the rain come and go? And assuming that it is, do you seriously believe that performing a pooja will make the Lord change his mind? What if some one else performs a similar pooja with the opposite intention in mind?

Did any one of you gentlemen ever hear of 'Geography' being taught in schools and colleges these days? It is a science which explains how rain and storms and tides take place. It makes no mention of lord Venkateswara anywhere, so you have a great chance of improving upon the science of geography by advocating your own theory of prayers and poojas. Or do you also belong to that class of adamant devotees, who inspite of advanced training in scientific disciplines, keep on saying

that 'science is science and venkatesh is venkatesh' and nonchallantly keep on sticking to unscientific, irrational and at times just plain foolish superstitions throughout their lives? I bet you must have been among those who kept on chanting the Gayatri Mantra at the time the skylab came down. Or does Lord Venkateshwara in your opinion hold monopoly rights of preventing all calamities, be it the skylab or rain at cricket?

Most of the people in our country are ridden with ignorance and superstition. Do you have any idea what a tremendous disservice you are doing to the nation by indirectly encouraging these illiterate masses to follow such utterly foolish methods of controlling natural phenomena like rain? Did you also ask lord Venkateshwara to see to it that the Indian Team wins the match? How many thousands did you offer? The Australians must have taken you for a bunch of nincompoops and certainly your voo-doo will be advertised throughout the world, but don't you think you owe an apology to the rationalists of this country? For the sake of our nation, stop indulging in such senseless practices, setting a bad example to other sports bodies; or the right thinking people of Bangalore will have to bring a morcha against you to stop you from spending public money over such private tomfoolery.

Not expecting a reply,

Yours sincerely,

(Sd/—Dr. S. J. Abhyankar)

INDIAN SCIENCE EXHIBIT SITS IN LIMBO

Efforts are under way to locate and reassemble a scientific exhibit from India dismantled by government agents before the public ever saw it—as a central feature of the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development to be held in Vienna next August.

The exhibit, which had been sitting in a locked gallery in New Delhi for 14 months, was surreptitiously carted off one night last summer at the behest of its original sponsor, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), a quasi Government body. It was apparently the victim of the shifting political situation resulting from the election of prime minister Morarji Desai, who defeated Indira Gandhi in March 1977. Conservative politicians evidently took offense at the tone of the exhibit, which challenged beliefs in astrology, 'godmen' traditional homeopathic medicine.

The only information about the exhibit available to Science is a sheaf of material to an American friend by Dr. P. M. Bhargava, who planned and oversaw construction of the exhibit. Bhargava is an internationally known scientist who heads the Centre for cellulose and Molecular Biology at the regional research laboratory in Hyderabad.

The exhibit, designed to present 'the method of science to the general public, originated as a result of a suggestion by the then-director of NCERT; it was a multimedia show featuring the efforts of scientists, engineers, artists, film-makers, and musicians. The exhibit cost about 300,000 rupees to put together but its market value

outside India was estimated at \$ 1 million. Constructed in Hyderabad, it was moved to New Delhi in early 1977, where it was set up in a gallery of the Bal Bhavan Society, an organization devoted to studies and welfare of children. It was supposed to be opened by Prime Minister Gandhi but this did not occur when she lost the election.

Leadership of NCERT subsequently changed and that agency withdrew its support. So the exhibit sat in the closed gallery while Bhargava went around looking for new backers and a new home for it. Then on an August night 100 men with trucks appeared and carried everything away in a matter of 6 hours – very likely causing extensive damage, since to pack the exhibits properly would have required several weeks.

The new head of NCERT, S. K. Mitra, explained to the press, which gave considerable coverage to the episode, that the exhibit had been taken down because there were scientific controversies about its content. Mitra was reported as saying 'a group of scientists' objected to certain displays, including a surrealistic picture of a reclining nude dreaming – designed to portray the nature of tachyons, particles that travel faster than light. The 'scientists', however, were not named; several prominent ones, however, have reportedly spoken highly of the exhibit.

Several displays reportedly offended political sensibilities. One panel in the exhibit was constructed as an attack on materializing objects from the air and the viewer was invited to judge whether that squared with the first law of thermodynamics. The display also emphasized that 'science has no high priests'.

Another part of the show cast aspersions on astrology by displaying samples of varying predictions for the same week contained in different magazines, and asking how these predictions withstood scientific scrutiny. Elsewhere, the exhibit questioned whether the 'method of science' was applied in the preparation and use of certain salt pills in homeopathic medicine.

Another offensive section related to the history of science, featured Marx and Lenin as pioneers in applying scientific principles to social theories and economic planning.

The exhibit ended with a quote from the out-of-favour Mrs. Gandhi to the effect that 'we want scientific thinking to destroy superstition which has darkened our lives.'

Bhargava believes that NCERT moved in to snatch the exhibit when officials heard of proposals to put it on display in Vienna. An Indian scientist in this country told 'Science' that the move was very likely initiated by 'henchmen' eager to please Prime Minister Desai—'You know that our prime minister drinks urine,' he said, a practice that falls in line with belief in homeopathic and naturopathic remedies. Dr. Bhargava is said to have met Desai to plead for release of the exhibit but so far no action has been taken.

The Indian Rationalist Association an organization devoted to promoting 'scientific temper' in the country, has gotten up in arms over the handlings of the exhibit. One member wrote a letter to the Times of India complaining that the country was 'sinking deeper and deeper into superstition, fatalism and religious hypocrisy.' He related that one scientist had been forced to resign as vice-chancellor of Bangalore University after he asked a prominent

'godman' to subject miraculous performances to a scientific probe. Last December the Rationalists Association filed a writ claiming that NCERT's dismantling of the exhibit was a violation of the Constitution. This is said to be the first legal case of its kind in the country.

The exhibit would have been the first of its kind designed to acquaint Indians with scientific thinking. The overall objective, according to Dr. Bhargava, 'was to show how useful and important it is to make the method of science an integral part of one's thinking and living, and how one can use this method profitably to solve one's day to-day problems.' To a Westerner it sounds harmless enough, but the designers of the exhibit apparently underestimated the degree to which advocacy of doubt and questioning could be constructed as a thrust to government authority.

In Indian press accounts of the affair, a professor is quoted as explaining the government's objections; 'We have no tradition of genuine doubt in our philosophy. One can either accept, reject, or remain passive, but one may not doubt or enquire. Doubt even in the West, dates clearly from Roger Bacon's time.'

Ward Morehouse, president of the Council on International and Public Affairs in New York, was vastly impressed with the exhibit and thought it would be a great way of showing that "science has very much come of age in at least some Third World countries in the past 30 years... This message, to be fully convincing, must come from the Third world itself." But whether it will come from the 'world's largest democracy' is very much in question.

Courtesy

'Science' (U.S.A.) April, 1979

A Historical Study of Islam-IV

—*U. A. Lokhandwala*

Status of Women in Islam

Essentially Arabian society being tribal, women enjoyed comparatively better status, than in feudal system wherein women are totally subjugated. Quran states "Women shall with justice have rights similar to those exercised against them, although men have a status above women". This reflects the actual status women enjoyed in Arabian society during Mohammed's time. Women enjoyed property rights. Mohammed's first wife Khadija, before her marriage with him, was carrying on her business independently before Mohammed joined her in that venture. Historians say that Mohammed recommended deserving cases of orphans, widows etc. for help to his wife Khadija. This indicates that the husband could not spend what belonged to his wife without her consent.

Though polygamy was widely prevalent, there was no ruling class and therefore, no

large harems where women are treated as mere chattels. Subsequently, when Muslims became masters of vast empire this evil was seen there in much larger scale.

Mohammed came across a number of problems concerning women, while he was in Medina, such as their behaviour, marriage, and divorce, the quantum of share of their inheritance, their status vis-a-vis men etc. There were some conventions, but no set rules. Islamic laws which were later codified into Sariah retained these local conventions and therefore, it is justified to consider all those laws immutable. Whereas, certain restrictions were put on women, latitudes were allowed to men in sexual matter. He could marry upto four wives if he could afford and also have sex with his slave girls, without any restriction to their number.

Quran prescribes that a woman, in the event of her husband's death or if she is divorced, has to wait for three to four months before re-marrying. Sexual intimacy out of wedlock was made punishable both for men as well as women. The Quran also lays down that "The adulterer may marry only an adulteress or an idolateress and vice versa". Later on the punishment for adultery was changed into stoning to death.

A male shall inherit twice as much as female. If there be more than two daughters, they shall have two-thirds of the

inheritance, but if there be only one, she shall inherit the half.

Quran clearly dictates that no one should covet the superiority Allah has given some above others. It further says "Men have authority over women because Allah has made the one superior to the other,....." In these verses the woman emerges in unfavourable light. When Islam spread to Persia and other areas with highly feudalised civilizations, these laws were interpreted in keeping with the social attitudes of people there.

Marriage in Islam is contractual due to tribe practice prevalent earlier in Arabia, unlike sacramental as in Christianity and Hinduism necessitating consent of women as a party to the contract. However, during the spread of Islam to other countries these laws were given conservative shape, restricting rights of women.

Transformation To Civilization

Islam fulfilled all functions for transformation of a primitive culture into an advanced culture. It became a cohesive force generating social solidarity, inculcated deference to authority and rights of others and it created new loyalty. The most important achievement of Mohammed was the establishment of rule of law for Arabia, wherein his genius remarkably worked. He gave to that society both civil as well as penal code, based on social customs and tribal practices. The penal code was largely based on tribal practices

and therefore, revenge-oriented. Quran prescribes it thus: "We decreed for them a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and a wound for a wound. But if a man charitably forbears from retaliation his remission shall atone for him." No where in Quran any crime is shown punishable with imprisonment, except for prisoners of war. It is probably because in the young and developing state of Islam, the concept or institution of jail had not been born. Thus originated in Mecca, Islam took final shape in Medina.

Developments following Mohammed's Death

It was almost impossible to fill the great vacuum created by Mohammed's death. He was not only a head of the State, but also a prophet, a law-giver and a spiritual guide. It was difficult to find a person who can replace him in all these respects. He had never claimed immortality, yet his sudden death came as a rude shock to his companions. They were confronted with the problem of finding his successor and with the procedure to be adopted for it. The Arabs had not yet developed the aptitude for a dynastic rule, as they were still living under the shadow of nomadic norms and tradition and continued to be tribal. Hence, soon after Mohammed's death the chiefs of all clans and important companions of Mohammed gathered at a place called Saqif bani Saida to choose the successor of Mohammed. The clan of

Banu Hashim wanted Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet, who left no son, to be the successor, the Qureshite emigrants wanted Abu Bakr and the Ansar (Medinese tribes of helpers) supported S'ad bin Abada, who was their leader. The debate for choosing the successor became acrimonious as claims and counter claims were staked and finally Abu Bakr was declared elected as the Caliph. However, the Shias believe that the prophet has appointed his son-in-law Ali as his spiritual as well as temporal successor. However, it is difficult to prove it as the tradition of the prophet quoted for it can be differently interpreted. Any how, this created unbridgeable chasm dividing Muslims into two sections Shias and Sunnis.

Though, the Bedouins and nomadic Arabs had enmasse became Muslim, they had not imbibed fundamentals of Islam and their generations old attitude towards society had not reconciled. Hence, according to the historians, there was wide-spread revolt of those Arabs that almost scared those in Medina and shook the new state. Abu Bakr took firm steps to put down the revolt and he finally succeeded in it.

Expansion of Islamic Power

Islam was a product of commercial society and therefore, it fully approved of commerce and profit, not only that it encouraged it. The character of the state was partly theological and partly dominated by commercial bourgeoisie in the time of the first four Caliphs.

Within the Arabian peninsula there was dearth of fertile land and increasing pressure on land could not maintain economic balance. Hence, outward expansion was the only alternative.

Within couple of years the Arabs took possession of Iran and penetrated into Persia on one hand, and became masters of Syria, Palestine and Egypt on the other. These victories were the final stage in the age long process of gradual infiltration from the barren desert to the adjacent fertile Crescent, the last Semitic migration.

To an extent, Islam was a social leveller in those times, in as much as there were no feudal system in its domain and resultant gross inequalities. Moreover, theoretically, it did not recognise discrimination of race and colour and accorded equal treatment to all believers. Hence, the tremendous appeal for the underdogs and exploited people in Persia and of regions bordering Arabia dominated by Roman empire.

Nomadic Arabs, who were in the forefront of conquests of mighty empires, had earlier no vested interest like power, wealth, property etc. to divide them and therefore they proved more effective in confronting their civilized counterparts who were used to life of luxury and divided amongst themselves due to diverse interests. But once the desert tribe achieved power and wealth, it lost its earlier fervour and courage and was lured into luxurious life, its group feeling and toughness of desert life was on

the wane. Their children grew-up too proud and they fell for easy life."

Shorn of political importance, as centres of power shifted to conquered territories, Mecca and Medina retained only religious significance throughout the Islamic history.

Decline of Islamic Empire

After the conquests of various provinces this heterogeneity increased and threw up number of baffling problems. Different people belonging to different regions and different classes did not embrace Islam for homogeneous reasons. They had different motives.

Islam, in theory at least, had not shown any preference for any tribe. However, in practice, city-based tribe of Quresh monopolised power, leaving the Bedouins high and dry. In the conquering armies too, they were mere soldiers under the command of Qureshites or Ansars from Medina. Moreover, the bloody power struggle between two sections of the same aristocratic tribe did not make much sense to them. They, therefore, revolted after the battle of Siffin, which took place between the armies of the fourth Caliph Ali and Muawiya, the governor of Syria. They were called Kharijities (seceders) as they seceded from Ali's army.

The other important heterodox movement in Islam, was the Shia movement. Shias are partisans of Ali and consider him to be the legitimate successor of Mohammed and

denounce the preceeding three Caliphs as usurpers. Kufa was their stronghold and their main following was among non-Arab clients and persons of low origin, though the leadership was in the hands of Hashimite Arabs.

The nomadic Arabs who became mainstay of the Kharijite movement, resented any government authority. Whereas, the central doctrine of Shias was hereditary dynastic rule, to which they were accustomed for ages in Persia.

Thus internecine wars followed bringing disintegration of the great Muslim empire.

The equality preached by Islam could be practiced only for a very limited period, when its followers were locked in fire and death struggle with the people of Mecca on the one hand and with the Jews of Medina on the other. Material means were scarce and hard to come by. Whatever was available had to be distributed equitably. But as wealth went on accumulating out of the conquests of foreign territories, those concepts went on being diluted and the efforts of Ali, the fourth Caliph to resurrect the principles of Islam failed in the changed atmosphere.

(Concluded)

"By and large the Turkish Muslim conquerors of India acted against the revolutionary, liberal, accommodating spirit of Islam. As such, they proved to be fanatical and cruel towards the conquered. But for the barbarities and the un-Islamic behaviour of the Muslim Monarchs who ruled for over six centuries, the entire Indian subcontinent might have embraced Islam as did many countries in the Middle East, North Africa and North-West Indian.

—P. N. BAZAZ.

Faith-Healers in West Germany

—R. Lakshminarayanan, Bangalore

"Stupidity is not the monopoly of any particular nation": I have heard this said by Dr. H. Narasimaiah on several occasions in answer to proponents of astrology, parapsychology etc. who defend their beliefs by referring to the prevalence of these beliefs in scientifically developed and technologically advanced countries. A report appearing in the popular West German illustrated magazine STERN (No. 41, 4th — 10th October 1979) on Faith-healers in West Germany can be alarming to rationalists in developing countries, with all their poverty and illiteracy. According to a public opinion survey conducted by the Allensbach Institute of Public Opinion (the West German equivalent of the American Gallup Poll) every fourth West German believes in astrology and every tenth West German is influenced by some form of superstition, especially soothsaying. (Population of West Germany: 60 million versus 700 million in India).

The Allensbach Institute of Public Opinion put another question to its interviewees: "People believed in witches in past centuries. Do you think there could be something in it, that is, do you think there are perhaps witches?" The result of the survey: two out of hundred adult

West Germans are convinced that there are witches." 9% think that there may be something in it, i.e. 5 million West Germans are inclined to believe in witchcraft. In the generation above the age of 60 years, the percentage of believers in witchcraft goes upto 17%. The belief is more widespread in South Germany than in North Germany. The West German Medical Information Service estimates that there are about 10,000 professional exorcists.

All this is alarming to us rationalists in India, when we consider that Germany is a country where there is no illiteracy, a country which has long been a leader in scholarship and science. Before World War II, 12 out of 45 Nobel Prizes awarded for physics and 16 out of 40 for chemistry went to the Germans. From 1946 to date Germans have won 13 Nobel Prizes. West Germany has the fourth highest Gross National Product (after the U.S., U.S.S.R. and Japan). Almost every family has a car and television set.

In the land which produced epoch-making thinkers like Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, Albert Einstein, Werner Heisenberg, Max Planck...there are, according to the article in STERN referred to above, hundreds (perhaps thousands) of faith-healers, exorcists etc. The article details the bizarre techniques of some of these faith-healers.

Seventy-six-year old Johann Sandholzer in the village Ollarzried in Lower Allgau bores two holes in an oak tree outside the village. Into these holes he drops the fingernails of a baby suffering from Rachitis (a metabolic disease affecting the bones caused by Vitamin D deficiency due to lack of sunlight). This is supposed to

cure the baby of Rachitis. The same Sandholser also treats thirteen-year old Monika suffering from epileptic fits after a fall from a window-sill. At the beginning of the treatment Sandholser had spent some time alone with the girl inside a closed room and had prayed with her. When they came out, Monika was made to eat half of a slice of bread. The old man crushed the other half and threw the crumbs over his shoulder into a pond for the fish to eat. Thereafter the old man and the girl prayed again in a maize field. He then made the sign of the cross over the girl and told her parents, she need not take the tablets prescribed by the doctor. The fits would not come back, he reassured them. If they did, he would visit her again.

Johann Sandholser began to practise this art of "sympathy healing" in 1925. He had himself been to a faith-healer named Xaver Rupfer in Rottach near Rempten in Allgau, to seek a cure for a sprained foot. From Rupfer he got a brochure on "sympathy healing." The brochure gives among other things the following cure: "For fevers of all kinds, write on a piece of paper: 'Walnut tree, walnut tree, I am coming to you. Take away my fever.' Then go to a walnut tree before sunrise, cut out a chip from the tree on its east side, put the piece of paper in the opening, close it with the chip. All the while repeat three times: 'Walnut tree, walnut tree, I am coming to you. Take away my fever.' Sandholser tried it when he had fever, and it worked — so he remembers. Then he began to heal others. Now he is a well-known "sympathy healer" and an exorcist.

Sandholser claims his faith-healing works with men as well as animals. A farmer

calls him when one of his pigs has fever. Sandholser covers the pig with a sack, says some mumbo-jumbo and strikes the pig with a cross. The farmer thanks Sandholser with a 20 Mark note (20 DM = Rs. 80). The farmer then requests Sandholser to an operation for breast cancer. Sandholser feels the swollen arm, strikes it with his cross, prays and assures them he would take away the pain.

Another 76 year old farmer Michael Gschwender of Bodelsberg undertakes to cure only diseases caused by the "devil." He holds a cross over the patient. If the cross twitches, he knows that the devil is at work. He also prays to cure the patient. The patient writes her name on a piece of paper and the faith-healer says: "Holy angel Michael, vanquish the devil, so that he does no harm to anyone. Oh, Holy Mary, bless this person and heal her."

The people who send for these healers are not poor or illiterate people. The parents of 13 year old Monika have a big farm with modern machines. The father knows quite a bit of the medical jargon used by the modern doctors who treated the girl. He has read the instructions on the medicine packs. He knows for example that a certain medicine changes the Electroencephalogram (EEG). Why then does he resort to these faith-healers? The father answers: "You would understand, if you have children. I would try anything that could help my Monika. The doctors had overdosed the girl and she became drowsy and dizzy. The fits kept coming. Then we heard of Sandholser. He came and spent a whole night with Monika alone. That was six weeks ago and since then she has not had fits. Sandholser said, we need

not give her any medicine, but my wife gives her a third of the dose prescribed by the doctors."

Asked what Sandholser did with Monika behind the locked door, the father shrugs his shoulders and says: "He has forbidden her to tell anybody about it." Monika keeps mum.

73 year old Joser Steiner of Purgstall near Scheibbs in Lower Austria diagnoses diseases with a pendulum. He is also a water diviner or dowser. He asks his patients to draw circles on a paper. Then he takes a pendulum and mumbles the names of dozens of diseases: He asks the pendulum: "Does the patient have migraine or cataract or glaucoma, tonsillitis, fever, tuberculosis, giddiness, kidney-trouble, diarrhoea, constipation, impotence etc." The pendulum is "silent", that is, it hangs motionless from his thumb and forefinger over the circles drawn by the patient. Then Steiner asks: "Does the patient have rheumatism?" The pendulum begins to swing. So it is rheumatism. The diagnosis over, Steiner prescribes a herbal decoction. The herbs can be had from a particular village drugstore.

Steiner claims that he can diagnose with his pendulum any disease. "People come to me with all kinds of diseases, Headache, stomach trouble, depression, cancer, consumption, alcoholism. The pendulum finds out everything. And then I prescribe a suitable treatment. Another important thing: Your bed should be in the right position. It should not be disturbed by ground radiations or underground water. To a patient who says his bed is far away in Hamburg (1600 kilometres away) Steiner hands over a piece of paper and asks him to draw a sketch of the house and the position of the bed. When the sketch is ready, steiner holds his pendulum over the paper. The pendulum does not move. Steiner says: "O. K. Your bed can stay where it is. There are no radiations disturbing it."

52 year old Fritz Plankenbichler in Gosling on the river Ybbs, also in Lower Austria, wards off the diseases of his patients by heating his own thigh. The patient writes his name on a piece of paper. Plankenbichler makes an anatomical sketch on the same paper, puts the paper on a table in front of him, stares at the paper and with his right hand strikes his own right thigh-hard. This way he "takes away" the pain, sufferings or diseases of the patient sitting in front of him.

Occasionally these bizarre practices come to the notice of the news media and the urban elite of West Germany. Not long ago a 23 year old University girl student named Anneliese Michel died of exhaustion and malnutrition after prolonged maltreatment by two exorcists, who were also catholic priests. The Bishop of Wurzburg knew about this case of exorcism and obviously allowed such practices. This case hit the headlines in the West German press.

Many people in West Germany are no doubt concerned about these practices. Dr. Herbert Schafer, a criminologist in Bremen, is committed to fighting against the menace of superstitions and parapsychological phenomena. He says: "It appears incredible that a normal person can risk his health and life at the hands of these uneducated quacks. But the uncritical and the credulous just fall for these tall claims".

The STERN reporter Ginter Dahl writes: It is just a short drive from the present to the middle ages. In the highly industrialised Federal Republic of Germany there are still hundreds of faithhealers and thousands of gullible patients.

My purpose in pilfering this material from STERN is to show what an uphill task we rationalists have in India and other developing countries with so much more illiteracy, ignorance and poverty.

CHILDREN'S CORNER

The Lucky Pen

That morning Sashi ransacked the house before leaving for school. He was to have a test in dictation that day and he had studied hard for it. But his pen was gone—his lucky pen.

He turned everything inside out in his search. Mummy and granny and his little brother Swastik all came to his aid, but they could not find it.

"I'm sure to fail," groaned Sashi, peering into a pickle jar for some silly reason, "And it's all your fault, Swastik. Who asked you to take my pen and draw crocodiles with it?"

"I didn't know it was a magic pen," murmured Swastik suddenly. "You ought to have told me."

"Not a magic pen, a lucky one," corrected Sashi. "Anybody'd be glad to have a pen like that. It never makes a mistake—not in arithmetic or dictations."

It really was Swastik's fault. On the evening before, Babu from Sashi's farm had come and almost gone down on his knees begging Swastik to give him Sashi's lucky pen. "I'll give you my pet kitten if you do. It's my only chance, Swastik! Please don't let me down!"

And Swastik had given it to him.

However, Sashi found the dictation easy, he wrote quickly and confidently, there was only one word he was not sure how to write: 'believe'—did the 'i' come first or the 'e'?

Sashi glanced up at Babu, who was sitting in front of him, and noticed that he was leaning over the desk as if trying to hide something.

As soon as the teacher read the word 'believe' he behaved very strangely indeed. First he got red in the face, then white, then shook something as if in anger. By the time the dictation was almost over he was in a great state of excitement. Suddenly Sashi found a note on his desk asking "How do you spell 'believe'?"

Sashi winked at Babu as much as to say 'I can't tell you now, the teacher's looking,' and it was then he noticed his lucky pen in Babu's hand.

"So that's what you've been hiding!" thought Sashi. "Just you wait, I'll get even with you for that!"

He was angry and would gladly have snatched it out of Babu's hand, but he had to check his work before handing it in. He did this thoroughly and, not finding any mistakes, took it up to the teacher's desk. When he got back to his own he wrote in letters big enough for Babu to read from where he was sitting:

"You can keep my pen. Ask it how to spell"

Then he gave his friend a little poke in the back to make him turn around.

ENTERTAINMENT?

—Nimai Ghosh

[Mr. Nimai Ghosh has been the harbinger of realism in Indian movies with his *Chinnamul* (Uprooted) dealing with the psychological conflict extended by India's partition. *Pathai Theriyuthu Paar*, a Tamil movie, speaks of candid approach to T. V. movement in celluloid. *Hamsa Geethe*, the Kannada movie he shot, took us to the new world of musical cosmos. It was an experience in itself. Now his latest *Suravali*, produced and directed by him (with his lense work) is yet another accomplishment in celluloid. He is the President of the Tamilnadu India-China People's Friendship Association and is a leader of Workers' Unions in film industry.—Ed.]

All performing arts from time immemorial are known to be vehicles of entertainment. In olden days 'Theru-Koothu', 'Poi-Kal-Kudirai,' 'Villu-Pattu', 'Mayil-Attam', 'Puli-Vesham,' and many more forms of classical and folk dances and songs were broadly the medium of entertainment in our part of the country. Most of the folk form of performing arts

have not become extinct. They are very much alive in the rural areas. They are still very popular in the country side. More sophisticated Drama theatres and Ballets and westernized instrumental orchestras and songs have pushed them out of the big cities and even the small towns. Concerts of classical songs and dances are also popular in the cities.

The most sweeping medium of entertainment that has created a sort of a whirlwind in the field of performing art is 'CINEMA'. This particular media of communication in the name of entertainment has taken the whole country by storm without making any distinction between the cities, and villages educated and illiterate, even rich and poor. Its vitality, power and visual charm attracts universal audience more effectively and strongly than any other performing art, in the world of entertainment.

The connotation, conception or the meaning of entertainment is generally associated with amusement, relaxation and gaiety. But the multifarious genres of films and their presentations raises serious question about the definition of entertainment. Of course the question could also have been asked concerning the folk arts already mentioned above, for they cater to various emotions of the audience ranging from humour to tearjerking pathos. Now, can we say that the factors that create painful sentiments and bring tears in your eyes, instead of amusing you, can be called

entertainment? In case of Cinema the varieties are still innumerable. If Cinema is accepted as one of the mediums of entertainment then the advent of it has brought many radical changes in the very concept of entertainment.

SILENT FILMS

I am myself a film goer from the year 1922, i.e. from the silent era. There was a golden age of slap-stick comedies made by immortal comedians like Charlie Chaplin, Harold Lloyd, Buster Keaton, Harry Langdon, Lupino Lane, Ben Turpin and many more. They were of course full of entertainment. They amused the audience, they created visuals which caused the audience to start with chuckles and end in belly laughter. Even in this genre of films, the great Chaplin introduced in the midst of fun and frolic some new elements which started changing the absolute conception of entertainment. His comedies brought forth in the foreground the hopes and tears of the poor common man—'The Tramp.' His fun was embroidered on the background of Tragedy. The films made by the pioneer of film making D. W. Griffith like 'The Birth of a Nation' and 'INTOLERANCE' and many more which established the fact that Entertainment cannot be confined within the periphery of amusement as crudely understood. The films have a responsible role to play.

THE TALKIES

Then from the advent of Talkies I have seen films from early thirties upto late sixties and early seventies, films made by masters

like, John Ford, Frank Capra, George Stevens, Fritz Lang, Billy Wilder, William Wellman, Rouben Mamoulian, Alfred Hitchcock, James Whale, Henry Hathaway, Luis Milestone and many others who made brilliant films which have reached the heights of classics. The subject matters handled by them are of such a wide range of varieties and significant meaning. For instance there was a period within the span already mentioned above wherein I have seen films particularly based on either songs or dances. For example, 'MAY TIME' (Featuring Jeanette MacDonald & Nelson Eddy) of the older days and 'The Sound of Music' of recent times. Films based on dances were made featuring the unforgettable pair of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. These films were of course made purely for amusement in the truest sense of the term.

HORROR FILMS

But films are also made and had been made like 'EXORCIST' (In recent years) and 'FRANKENSTEIN' (In the older times). These have nothing to do with amusement and as the term denotes, they are horror pictures. But they run very well at the Box Office. There were and there are films with deep social significance like 'Grapes of Wrath' or 'Disfranchisement' which kept the audience engrossed inside the theatres.

COMMERCIAL FILMS

Did these films amuse the film goers? No! Did they entertain? Yes? If you

are glued to your chair and your eyes and ears are rivetted to the screen for two continuous hours, you are entertained. That is how this word ENTERTAINMENT has acquired a new interpretation. To-day there are two classes of film makers. There are commercial Film Producers on one side, and good off-beat healthy and purposeful film makers consisting mainly of Technicians or progressive thinkers on the other. Commercial Film Producers basically composed of business men "coming from different fields of business with surplus profit earned elsewhere to invest in films for quick return. They come with the fixed idea that Film means entertainment, and entertainment means crude comedies having no relevance to the story, erotic songs and dances and fights that will tickle the pathological excitement of the audience. They very aptly put that sex and violence are the main ingredients of film trade today. They make no secret of the fact that they are traders and not teachers.

ART FILMS

But the good, healthy, off-beat and progressive Film Makers' products are generally classified as Art Films and they hold an entirely different view about Film Making. They say that the Film is of course made to entertain people, but the act of entertaining the audience need not necessarily centre round exploiting the baser instincts of the human being. They believe that you should exploit the nobler instincts of man and still you can provide entertain-

ment. They say: 'provide him with more of intellectual delight and less of pathological excitement.' This group believes that apart from providing entertainment, the Film has a very significant role to play in the life of a nation. So the word 'ENTERTAINMENT' as far as the film is concerned, for that matter any creative artistic and aesthetic work is concerned, cannot be kept confined to its vulgar meaning of amusement only. It should be interpreted and extended to the level of intellectual delight.

This conflict of interpretation of Entertainment, this battle of establishing the new and true value of entertainment had been waged in the past and is still being waged in every centre of Film Making all over the world. And it will continue for all time to come. In all other western countries, the standard of Film making has reached a level, generally so high, that the gap between the commercial producers and the Art Film Producers are getting comparatively narrowed down, which is not the case in our country. The gap is still very much wide here. So the battle to decide what is entertainment has rather started in India only now and it will continue for quite a long time till Indian Commercial Film Making reaches the level of its counter parts in Europe and America. One may ask 'Haven't we made films whose value of entertainment extends to the level of intellectual satisfaction?' My answer will be 'Of course we have done it, but they can be counted on fingers, and as such they are exceptions. And exceptions are not rules.'

—Courtesy : — ICAFO Speaks
October, 79.

Studies of India

Book-Review

Karl Marx and Asian Religion

The special lectures given by Dr. Trevor Ling, Professor of Comparative Religion at the University of Manchester, U. K. at the Bangalore University in March 1973 are now brought out by the University in the form of a booklet.

Before Marx studied Asian religion, he was interested in the use of religion by Prussian state. He didn't study religion for its own sake, nor did he venture into its metaphysical aspects. He was merely concerned with it as a tool of exploitation in the hands of the state. To quote Dr. Ling "The major thrust of his own critique was directed against the use made of religion by the Prussian state for its own ends, and by other similar Western states for the same purpose, namely, the maintenance of their own socially and economically exploitative power. The struggle against religion itself he saw as relatively unimportant". Marx said, "to abolish religion as the illusory happiness of the people is to demand their real happiness. The demand to give up illusions about the existing state of affairs is the demand to give up a state of affairs which needs illusions". What a realistic assessment indeed! The dope of illusory happiness was better than the pangs of the hard realities for the poor.

Subsequently when Marx extended his researches in history and society beyond Europe, it was to India that he devoted special attention. His interest in India arose from his work as the London correspondent of the New York Daily Tribune beginning in 1952 after living under trying circumstances with his family at London for three years. The Tribune was known for its anti-slavery, anti-colonial radical stance and finding himself at home, Marx explored British colonial politics in India. He wrote that the people of England bore the taxes for Britain's Indian empire while the merchant class of the East India Company enriched themselves with their monopoly of Indo-British trade. He called it 'the privilege of plundering India'!

There were many continental refugees at that time at Soho where Marx lived and British India of the mid 19th century was the one Marx studied more thoroughly than any other Asian country. The contradictions in our religio-social life struck him and he said of Hinduism, "That religion is at once a religion of sensualist exuberance and a religion of self-torturing asceticism, and religion of the Lingam and the Juggernaut, the religion of the Monk and of the Bayadere". It is the contrast within Hindu religion that impresses him, not the contrast between Hindu and Muslim religions. Marx hinted on our fatalism and ascetic renunciation that left little scope for egalitarian social progress when he said that the village communities "subjugated man to external circumstances instead of elevating man to be the sovereign of circumstances, that they transformed a self-developing social state into never-changing natural destiny,

and thus brought about a brutalising worship of nature, exhibiting its degradation in the fact that man, the sovereign of nature, fell down on his knees in adoration of Hanuman, the monkey, and Sabbala, the cow".

English Religious Hypocrisy

Marx was equally vehement in his criticism of the English religious hypocrisy. "While they (the English) combated the French revolution under the pretext of defending 'our holy religion', did they not forbid at the same time, Christianity to be propagated in India, and did they not, in order to make money out of the pilgrims streaming to the temples of Orissa and Bengal, take up the trade in the murder and prostitution perpetrated in the temple of Juggernaut?" Marx was obviously referring to the Jagannath temple at Puri where in his own words again, "the priests of the temple who were under the protection of the East India Company, reaped immense profits from mass pilgrimage while at the same time encouraging temple prostitution, and from pompous festivities which were accompanied by the suicide of self-torture of fanatic believers". The Hindus were virtuous in the art of self-torturing and the Juggernaut festivals were "the bloody rites of a religion of cruelty". Here again with his sense of equanimity Marx blames the British, claimants of a superior civilisation for their methods of torture in administering India. In these assessments of Hinduism's contradictions Marx probably relied on Western writers in India who may have been unduly harsh on the natives while trying to justify imperialistic rule.

But what impresses one is the theoretical explanation he offered on some of the

features of the religion. In the words of Dr. Ling "he explained, Hindu sensuality and cruelty as the natural consequence of a stagnant type of social organisation, namely, the primitive village republics which he believed to be the basis of the Asiatic mode of production."

Marx felt that the English free trade heralded "the only social revolution ever heard of in India" by breaking up the small family communities based on domestic industry by blowing up their economic basis. He talked of "English interference having placed the spinner in Lancashire and the weaver in Bengal, or sweeping away both Hindu spinner and weaver". The primitive Indian communities had in fact provided the perfect foundation for Oriental despotism, for "they constrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur of historical energies".

Marx felt that social progress will lead to religion being discarded. "Only when the practical relations of everyday life consist of intelligible and reasonable relations between men, and between men and nature, will the religious halo, the religious reflection of the improperly understood world, the mystical veil which otherwise hangs over life, disappear. But this will happen only after 'a long and painful process of development.' Where did Marx's Asiatic mode of production fit in the Marxian principle of the progress to a socialist society from ancient mode through the feudal to the bourgeois-capitalist and thus eventually to socialism? Unlike the Russian sociologist M. M. Kovalevsky, Marx did not equate the

Asiatic mode with feudalism, but none the less, subsequently omitted mention of the Asiatic mode as a separate phenomenon in his philosophy. Thus it seems that on second thoughts Marx did not feel it necessary to take up the Asiatic mode separately and offer an independent explanation.

Borrowing his account largely from British historians and administrators Marx thought that primitive Indian communities were self sufficient with very little social inter-course, whereas for a variety of reasons including marriage affiliations, market fairs, pilgrimages etc. this was not so. Dr. Ling says "It appears therefore that Marx's sources led him into making an incorrect analysis of Indian society and Hindu religion."

But then Marx never undertook any serious study of either India or her religion. It was 'incomplete, hurried and disrupted.' In his researches in European socio-political conditions, India was 'a subject on the periphery of his horizons.' Dr. Ling says "There are good grounds for thinking that if Marx had had access to the kind of sources which are now available for the study of Indian society, he would at least have been able to demonstrate a large extent of agreement between the role of ecclesiastical religion in Germany in the 1840s and the role of the Brahmins in religion in India, in the nineteenth century as well as in many preceding centuries. There are greater possibilities for using Marx's basic model of the social relationship between religion and economic interests in the Indian case than he appears to have supposed. Had Marx had access to more adequate sources of information he would certainly have been able to find examples of situations in Indian history

where religion, especially Brahmanical religion, had played a role very similar to that which State Protestantism had played in Europe."

Buddhists Marxists and Christians in the 1970s

The second lecture in the booklet deals with the subject of present day Marxism in comparison to the world's two major religions—Buddhism and Christianity.

The communist take over of Laos and Cambodia necessitated some kind of accommodation with Buddhism. The Government of Laos in October 1976 set out its policy towards the Sangha. They said that the Buddhist monks "were to study the texts of Buddhism, and, along with this, politics, in order that they might 'understand political issues correctly', since in the view of the government 'Buddhist monks are political cadres of the Lord Buddha who are fighting injustice in the world'. In Sri Lanka, the English speaking urban oriented monks catering to the Sinhalese bourgeoisie deny any affinity between Buddhist and Marxist teachings. Not so, with rural monks who minister to the poorer sections.

Similarly in Thailand, the top echelons and wealthier monasteries of Bangkok are closer to the monarchy. But the student underground movement of the Thai countryside highlighted the Marxist influence in their rejection of the 'sycophantic Buddhism of the large Bangkok monasteries'. In fact there was affinity in the teachings of Buddhism and Marx and as Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya says what Buddhism pointed to was the full flowering of Marx's dialectical materialism; until Marxist

philosophy had developed, Buddhist social philosophy was the best approximation available.

In Christianity, the recent concept of 'Liberation theology' concerning itself with the condition of oppressed people steers midway between dogmatic Marxism and dogmatic ecclesiastical theology. Liberation theology began in Latin America, but has been welcomed in other areas of the world.

But ultimately Marxism's affinity vis-à-vis any religion will depend on one's stance in interpreting the respective religion. Some Buddhists feel that their religion is atheistic while others stress on the transcendental nature of Buddha. The concept of God is different in Muslims and Christians. Even among Christians Irenaeus's God is not the same as Calvin's God.

Along with 'Liberation Theology' softening of the dogmatic stance of the ecclesiasts has resulted. It is not perhaps characterised by the same obscurantism which made Marx describe the western ecclesiastical Christianity of his day as the ideology of a dominant, privileged class.

Will this softening of the stance—in itself an acknowledgement of the failure to answer modern science and its rational protagonists—make it a spokesman of the under-privileged? This reviewer does not think so. Religion will remain a spokesman of the privileged till it is thrown overboard. The 'social concern' of the theologians is merely to appease their own guilty conscience or else an intelligent strategy for survival. Theology by its very nature is insulated from the common man. Individual theologians may

be different but there can be no effective 'Liberation Theology.' Even Mother Theresa does not make sense when she describes the lives of her pitiable clientele as gift from God!

This softening is itself a supreme tribute to Marx. As the author rightly concludes "The human disposition towards the universe which is characterised as belief in God is, at this point in the twentieth century, not to be identified necessarily either with the foolish and credulous literalism or with the cynical obscurantism with which Karl Marx had to contend in nineteenth century Germany and England. Some share in the credit or the responsibility for this must go to Marx himself.....".

The interesting booklet on Marxian thought titled 'Karl Marx and Asian Religion' by Dr. Trevor Ling, published by the Bangalore University and economically priced is available for sale at I.R.A.

V. Gopalakrishnan,
Madras.

(Readers requiring the above publication may send Rs. 2/- (including postage) by M.O. to the Treasurer, I.R.A. 28/18, Pantheon Road, Madras-8.Ed.)

THE SUICIDAL SWAMI !

From his boyhood Tirth Ram had a streak of desperateness in his mental makeup which at times made him behave strangely. Once when he had a mathematical problem to solve he took a vow that he would complete the job before sunrise and if unsuccessful he would kill himself; to do so, he put a knife under his seat. The tendency to commit suicide seems to have been present throughout his short span of life.

—P. N. BAZAZ.

Caste System & A way out

—Prof: G. SINGH, Rupa, Punjab

The word 'HARIJAN' includes many sub-castes belonging to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. These people have been subjected to untold sufferings and privations. The British rule brought a little relief to their sufferings though indirectly. When Independence came the hopes of Harijans soared. Special concessions were granted to them in services. The Constitution promised them equality in all fields. Untouchability has been declared a crime. As a result; they are manning higher posts in various Govt. departments,

However their present progress must not be measured without referring to their social background and the atrocities committed on them simply because they were born in a particular caste. Their present position in Harayana, Bihar, Gujarat and other Central and Southern Indian States is unenviable. The tragedy is that even after 30 years the outlook of higher castes has not undergone change towards them. I feel that caste system can be abolished more speedily if the initiative comes from higher caste people. But unfortunately a section of these people burn the huts of harijans, ban their entry into religious places, murder them ruthlessly and boycott them socially.

Much criticism is heard of against the policy of reservation in services for harijans. Many anti-reservation associations have been formed which are raising hue and cry. Their activities are further adding to the spread of caste-feelings. I give below some steps, which, if initiated can go a long way in making our society a model for others. To begin with, I may say, the initiative must come from higher castes. It is they who should come forward and mix with lower castes by indulging in interdining and inter-marriage. But there must be a spirit of reforming the society behind this effort because otherwise such step would amount to have been taken for selfish purpose. Secondly we should strive towards the establishment of a society based not on

private property. Let everybody work and eat accordingly. The harijans need it most and therefore they would work for it.

If the higher caste Hindus are responsible for this caste system, the Harijans are also responsible to some extent. There exists a caste system within themselves. In Punjab there are Ramdasias, Majhis Sikhs, Chamars, Adharmis, Bazigin, Balmikis etc., who all belong to scheduled caste but do not inter-marry and inter-dine. Each of them considers his caste distinct from the other. They should first of all abolish their own distinct entities and should work to create a sense of oneness and refine themselves. The tragedy is that even educated among themselves are not ready to take the initiative.

There are many poor Harijans in India and yet it is they who spend lavishly on social ceremonies, religious rituals which for them are insignificant. They will have to curb this expenditure of theirs. They should understand that it is these rituals which have put them into this low social position in Indian society. The same money should be spent on educating their children and raising their standard of living. What I observe is that most of them have accepted their low social position as destined for them. Have they ever thought how God placed them in this inhuman position. If so most of them would already have become rationalists.

In order to save India from the clutches of caste-system a new social order should be ushered in. But how? It can be done by shunning all existing social values which are suicidal for the growth of progressive society. The new social values should replace these. This can be done by withdrawing all divinity from the books which spread caste feeling. These should be presented as words of men not of god. The government has a responsibility to render all possible help to the intellectuals to enable them to create new social values. All progressive human societies have been the product of great intellectuals. Unfortunately after independence no positive step has been taken by them in this direction. But these intellectuals most of whom are rationalists will have to take the lead and let us hope that the Government does her part of the task.

I. R. A. Endowment Fund

Readers might be aware that I. R. A. ENDOWMENT FUND has been established in 1978 for ensuring a recurring income for the continuous publication of the journal without interruption. Though it was envisaged that the fund would grow into at least Rs. 1 lakh by the end of 1980, it is disheartening to note that we have been able to collect only Rs. 7,134.15, so far.

Each and every rationalist sympathiser is therefore once again earnestly requested to send generous contributions for the fund. It may kindly be noted that all the contributions are being deposited in a Nationalised Bank under long term Fixed Deposits.

Members are further requested to earmark a portion to the estate in their testaments. For more particulars please write to IRA, Madras-600 008.

Ms. S. V. VASUNDHRA,
Treasurer, I.R.A.

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—A. SURYANARAYANA
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